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ABSTRACT

This publication reports on the results of 35,793 high school participants in the Foreign Policy Association's 1993 study and discussion program focusing on opinions about U.S. foreign policy. The topics highlighted in the research include: (1) the U.S. in a New World; (2) the United Nations; (3) Germany's role; (4) China; (5) Trade; (6) Russian and Central Asian Republics; (7) India and Pakistan; and (8) Children at Risk. Demographic data are included about those returning the survey. The questions about each issue and the percentages of responses are included in the analyses, as well as some overall conclusions about responses on the topic of foreign policy. (EH)

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National Opinion Ballot Report

October 1993

RESULTS OF NATIONAL OPINION SURVEY ON U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

The 35,800 ballots cast by participants in the Foreign Policy Association's 1993 *Great Decisions* study and discussion program indicate

SUPPORT for:

- NAFTA, conditional on environmental guarantees
- Supplying U.S. troops for UN peace-enforcement operations
- UN military action against countries suspected of developing nuclear weapons
- Most-favored-nation trade status for China but with strings attached
- Multilateral approach to foreign policy (by same overwhelming margin as in 1992)
- Reduced U.S. troop commitment to NATO
- Treating Russia as "first among equals" but not at expense of other successor states

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS

PARTICIPANTS:

- Criticize UN's slow, weak response in Somalia, Bosnia
- Put social problems at top of list of domestic priorities—slightly ahead of deficit, economy
- Tilt strongly toward India, not Pakistan
- Support UN Population Fund and ratification of UN Convention on Rights of the Child

★ ★ ★

Opinion ballots are included in each annual *Great Decisions*, a 96-page briefing book prepared by the national, nonpartisan Foreign Policy Association. The ballots reflect the views of some of the 250,000 people who take part in study and discussion of eight foreign policy issues. Over 70 percent of the respondents this year are college graduates. Two thirds are opinion leaders who are asked their views on foreign policy sometimes or often. The ten states whose participants submitted the largest number of ballots are California, Illinois, Florida, Oregon, Ohio, Virginia, New York, Texas, Arizona and Colorado, in that order.

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TOPIC 1: U.S. IN A NEW WORLD

At a time of bewildering upheaval around the globe, National Opinion Ballot participants exhibit a remarkable stability in their foreign policy attitudes. Asked to choose the principal international role of the U.S. from among three alternatives offered, eight of ten participants this year opted for working through international organizations such as the United Nations. That share is practically indistinguishable from the proportion choosing this option in 1992 (81 percent). In contrast, only a tiny fraction voiced support for having the U.S. take the lead in solving global problems (7 percent in both years). There was also little support for seeing the U.S. getting involved only when directly affected (7 percent in both years). The balloting demonstrates that a commitment to multilateralism runs deep and strong among participants. Neither the neo-isolationist school nor the realist school has much of a following. Still, some multilateralists appended to their choice comments such as, "but do not give up the right to unilateral action."

While the basic attitude on the U.S. role in world affairs is quite firm, there is room for considerable variation on domestic priorities. None of the domestic policy alternatives commands anywhere near a majority. It is more a three-way tie among dealing with social problems, reducing the budget deficit and stimulating the economy. Only one point is clear: hardly anyone sees military strength as a pressing issue these days. Compared to last year, the deficit has significantly increased in importance (from 20 percent to 29 percent), a reflection perhaps of the presidential campaign of Ross Perot. The economy ranks as a slightly more pressing issue this year (25 percent, up from 22 percent), while the importance of social problems has slipped (from 40 percent to 31 percent). *Great Decisions* participants do not seem widely at odds with the domestic agenda of the new Clinton Administration.

Issue A. The principal international role of the U.S. should be to:

Take the lead in solving international problems.	7%
Work through organizations such as the UN to solve global problems.	79%
Participate in solving international problems only when they affect Americans directly.	7%

Issue B. The domestic policy priority of the U.S. should be to: (readers were asked to rank the following in order of importance)

Hone its competitive edge in the global economy.	12%
Address social problems (education, health, crime).	31%
Stimulate the economy.	25%
Reduce the budget deficit.	29%
Maintain its military strength.	3%

NOTE: These percentages and others reported below may not add up to 100 because some participants did not mark particular ballots or volunteered other responses not shown here.

TOPIC 2: UNITED NATIONS

Year in and year out, a majority of participants hold the UN in high regard. If they had any reservation in 1993 it was that the UN did not act quickly and strongly enough in the former Yugoslavia and Somalia. By a similar margin, three quarters applauded proposals to use U.S. troops for peacekeeping and favored prompt payment of the U.S. debt to the UN. What is more, participants overwhelmingly favored UN intervention when a nation was suspected of producing nuclear, biological or germ-warfare weapons or when it was guilty of serious violations of human rights. They did not consider national sovereignty a compelling obstacle to UN action in such cases. Nearly eight in ten participants advocated a "world-policeman" role for the UN, although many did so with reservations.

Reservations about the UN volunteered by participants in their written comments largely centered on fiscal irresponsibility, bureaucracy and lack of checks and balances. One comment was, "After the UN demonstrates fiscal responsibility, the U.S. should pay all back and current dues." Another participant demanded that the "UN needs a system of checks and balances." Calls for reform, including that the "structure of the Security Council needs to be reviewed," were frequent. But whatever the misgivings, the following sentiment echoed the feelings of many: the "UN is the best we've got; let's support it."

Issue A. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	AGREE	AGREE WITH RESERVATIONS	DISAGREE	DISAGREE WITH RESERVATIONS
The UN should be given power by the U.S. and other member states to be the world policeman.	27%	51%	11%	8%
The UN should have intervened more strongly, and sooner, in the former Yugoslavia.	40%	34%	16%	7%
The UN should have intervened more strongly, and sooner, in Somalia.	43%	32%	14%	8%
The U.S. should hold troops in readiness for use by the UN as peacekeepers.	42%	37%	10%	8%
The U.S. should keep troops trained and in readiness for use by the UN in peace-enforcement.	42%	36%	9%	6%
The U.S. should immediately pay what it owes the UN for peacekeeping and the regular budget.	42%	33%	12%	5%
If a government is suspected of building nuclear, chemical or germ-warfare weapons, and refuses to permit surprise inspection of the factories, the UN should impose sanctions and, if necessary, take military action.	46%	35%	8%	4%
If human rights are being seriously violated anywhere, resulting in injury or death to large numbers of people, the UN should intervene whether or not the government asks for help.	33%	38%	12%	6%

TOPIC 3: GERMANY'S ROLE

The end of the cold war has not spelled the end of an alliance forged to wage that war, not yet anyway, *Great Decisions* participants agreed. They want to see NATO maintained, though with fewer U.S. troops stationed in Europe. This is the alternative chosen by two thirds. It is a well-calibrated position between the status quo, on one side (6 percent), and an all-out withdrawal (3 percent), on the other. Even a toothless commitment to NATO, that is, one without U.S. forces in Europe, has few friends among participants (17 percent). By and large, a U.S. presence in Europe was seen not as charity but, as one participant put it, "to protect our interests in Europe." Others pointed to latent fears of a resurgent Germany: "Unless the world feels safe about Europe, that is, Germany, there will be U.S. troops there." NATO, it seems, owes its life as much to a desire to contain Germany as it did to contain the then Soviet Union.

Yet few participants favor increasing U.S. aid in order to assure the U.S. a share of the potentially lucrative markets of Eastern Europe. The majority of participants (53 percent) are content to let Germany, among others, assume most of the burden of providing economic assistance. Neither an increase in U.S. aid nor a decrease elicited much enthusiasm.

European integration likewise drew firm though less fervent support from participants. While hardly anyone urged the U.S. to discourage European integration, one third felt the U.S. should neither discourage nor encourage it.

Issue A. Concerning the U.S. military commitment to NATO, the U.S. should:

Maintain its commitment to NATO and its present force level in Europe.	6%
Maintain its commitment to NATO but reduce its force level in Europe.	68%
Maintain its commitment to NATO but remove U.S. forces stationed in Europe.	17%
Withdraw from NATO and remove U.S. forces stationed in Europe.	3%

Issue B. Concerning economic assistance to Eastern Europe, Russia and the other former Soviet states, the U.S. should:

Increase its share of the burden because otherwise Germany and others will gain access to their resources and potentially lucrative markets and the U.S. will lose out.	20%
Maintain present levels of assistance and let Germany and others with more direct geographic and cultural ties assume most of the burden.	53%
Decrease the current level of economic assistance.	9%

Issue C. Concerning European integration, to the extent that the U.S. has any influence in the matter it should:

Support European integration.	53%
Discourage European integration.	2%
Neither support nor discourage European integration.	33%

TOPIC 4: CHINA

Participants are torn over U.S. policy toward China. Most favored the course of "constructive engagement," a double-track approach of dealing both with the government and the not-quite legal opposition in China. But there were strong minority opinions for either letting the Chinese determine their own future (29 percent) or setting tough conditions (16 percent). "The U.S. should not dictate to other sovereign nations," was one comment. Another pointed the finger right back at the U.S.: "As long as we (the U.S.) are not squeaky clean, it is presumptuous to talk about 'human-rights abuses' to others."

On the matter of trade with China, few participants were prepared to renew most-favored-nation status for China outright, though hardly anyone preferred a blanket refusal. But participants disagreed on what conditions to attach to renewal. One third of the participants named conditions unrelated to economics, such as concessions on human rights, while roughly one quarter wanted to make sure that trade with China does not benefit state-owned industries.

Trade issues and human-rights abuses were each cited by roughly 30 percent as the most serious obstacle to improved U.S. relations with China. But far more serious, in the eyes of participants, loomed China's sale of nuclear and missile technology (63 percent). This was by far the biggest obstacle to improved relations, but one that the Chinese have in their power to remove.

Issue A. With regard to overall policy toward China, the U.S. should:

Condition future relations on China's ending human-rights abuses, eliminating trade barriers and halting sales of nuclear technology.	16%
Follow a course of "constructive engagement": continue negotiating with the government while keeping lines open to the dissidents.	47%
Maintain correct relations with the government to secure U.S. interests: leave China's future (including the question of economic and political liberalization) to the Chinese.	29%

Issue B. Concerning trade with China, the U.S. should:

Renew China's most-favored-nation status unconditionally.	19%
Renew China's most-favored-nation status but restrict it to exports produced by private enterprise, not exports of state-owned industries.	27%
Make renewal of China's most-favored-nation status conditional on Chinese concessions in non-trade areas, for example human rights.	33%
Refuse China most-favored-nation status.	3%

Issue C. How serious are the following obstacles to improved U.S. relations with China? (Percent answering "very serious")

China's sale of nuclear and missile technology and conventional weapons	63%
Trade issues, including Chinese "dumping" and theft of technology	30%
Ideological differences	9%
Human-rights abuses by China	28%
U.S. military sales to Taiwan	13%
Differences over Hong Kong's future	12%

TOPIC 5: TRADE

Environmental concerns are a key reason why participants refused to endorse unconditionally the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with Mexico. Worries about human rights and the fairness of elections in Mexico were also cited by a majority, but to a lesser degree. Three of every four participants conditioned their support for NAFTA on Mexico's enforcement of environmental laws. In addition, some volunteered their concern about jobs and immigration. "I am very troubled by the fact that many U.S. jobs will be lost," wrote one. Another worried that "cheap (Mexican) labor will hurt U.S. employment and do nothing to increase Mexican living standards." It also seemed that obtaining "Mexico's help in preventing illegal immigration into the U.S." would make it easier for some participants to accept the treaty.

In pondering what kind of trade policy to champion, participants endorsed several principles. One was a strong preference for multilateral agreements over regional ones. Another was the desire to penalize trading partners who do not "play by the rules." A sizeable majority also favored managed trade. In contrast, sentiment for free trade appeared less widespread this year. The world economy has become a tougher place for the U.S. in the 1990s, and the opinions of *Great Decisions* respondents got tougher, too. The view that "free trade is best" was expressed by a participant who was in the minority.

Issue A. With regard to the North American free-trade agreement with Mexico, the U.S. should:

	YES	NO
Support the agreement unconditionally.	17%	64%
Condition support on Mexico's enforcement of environmental laws.	77%	10%
Condition support on Mexico's protection of human rights.	59%	20%
Condition support on Mexico's holding of free, fair elections.	40%	35%
Break off negotiations.	5%	64%

Issue B. What trade policy is in the best interest of the U.S.?

	AGREE	DISAGREE
Redouble efforts to bring multilateral negotiations to a successful conclusion and proceed cautiously on regional trade agreements.	67%	8%
Give priority to developing a Western Hemisphere free-trade association.	47%	21%
Insist that trading partners "play by the rules," penalizing those that do not, and negotiate bilateral agreements if necessary to open foreign markets.	64%	11%
Adopt a policy of managed trade, promoting important high-technology industries to make the U.S. more competitive.	55%	16%

TOPIC 6: RUSSIA & CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLICS

As the former Soviet Union lies shattered, the U.S. faces the problem of how to apportion its attention and aid among the various successor states. *Great Decisions* participants seemed to be of two minds. While nearly eight in ten favored treating Russia as "first among equals," almost seven in ten wanted the U.S. to avoid giving Russia special status at the expense of the other successor states. It should be noted, however, that many participants supported those options with reservations. There may be little contradiction between their opinions. It seems that most want to accord Russia a greater role but not one that would hurt the other states of the former Soviet Union. What is quite certain is that the majority opposed a turn toward isolationism now that the cold war is over. Over 60 percent disagreed with the option of letting Russia take care of itself.

There is general agreement over the need to assist Central Asian republics with technological assistance, training and skills in agriculture and irrigation. Eighty-one percent favored this option, though some with reservations. By contrast, support was weaker for a policy of relying on friends in the region, such as Turkey, to promote U.S. interests. The threat posed by religious upheaval weighed on the minds of participants. One warned that "we can't let Islamic fundamentalism gain a foothold." Another voiced the fear that "we won't make much progress as long as religion determines their actions."

Issue A. In its policy toward Russia, the U.S. should:

	AGREE	AGREE WITH RESERVATIONS	DISAGREE	DISAGREE WITH RESERVATIONS
Support Russia as the "first among equals" of the successor states of the former Soviet Union.	31%	47%	11%	4%
Avoid placing primary emphasis on relations with Russia at the expense of the other successor states.	29%	38%	19%	5%
Pay attention to other U.S. concerns now that the cold war is over and let Russia take care of itself.	8%	17%	24%	37%

Issue B. In its policy toward the Central Asian republics, the U.S. should:

	AGREE	AGREE WITH RESERVATIONS	DISAGREE	DISAGREE WITH RESERVATIONS
Cultivate relations by extending economic aid and technical assistance to alleviate poverty.	37%	38%	10%	3%
Recognize that its own influence is limited and continue to provide primarily technology, training and skills in agriculture and irrigation.	52%	29%	6%	2%
Rely on friends, such as Turkey, that have cultural and geographic ties to the region, to promote U.S. interests.	27%	36%	15%	9%
Make a long-term commitment to assisting Central Asia's development through dialogue with its governments and assistance and exchange programs.	42%	33%	9%	3%

TOPIC 7: INDIA AND PAKISTAN

When it comes to defining the key U.S. interest with regard to two powers in South Asia that have frequently gone to war with each other, *Great Decisions* participants are most preoccupied with nuclear weapons. Four of ten gave the need to restrain nuclear proliferation their highest priority. One urged to "use mass media to dramatize the horrors of nuclear weapons, i.e. like ABC's 'The Day After.'" By contrast, two of ten participants ranked as their highest concern support for democratic leaders and policies, and one in ten, the protection of human rights. Hardly anyone cited independence for Kashmir.

Despite the great concern over nuclear weapons in the hands of India and Pakistan, there was little agreement over how to deal with this problem. One group of participants admitted that it was too late to achieve a nuclear freeze and favored patching up relations with both countries. This group was slightly larger than a group that hoped India and Pakistan could be persuaded to join a regional nuclear-free zone. Only a handful of participants expressed faith in the efficacy of economic pressure on India and Pakistan to thwart whatever nuclear ambitions they harbored. As often happens in discussions of issues like these, participants took the opportunity to point a finger back at the U.S. As one demanded: "Stop testing in the U.S. and reduce our nuclear stockpile."

Asked to choose whether the U.S. should favor India or Pakistan, practically four of ten participants would not make a choice. Those who did overwhelmingly favored India, a democratic and secular state but one that has often been a thorn in U.S. foreign policy. But while 50 percent of the participants favored India, compared to only 9 percent for Pakistan, 13 percent wrote in "neither," with the remainder giving no answer.

Issue A. With regard to the development and spread of nuclear weapons by India and Pakistan, the U.S. should:

Increase economic pressure on India and Pakistan and encourage other aid donors to withhold aid.	10%
Instead of relying on economic leverage, which has not been effective, promote a regional nuclear-free zone, which would include India and Pakistan.	38%
Acknowledge that it is too late to achieve a nuclear freeze and work to rebuild U.S. influence in Pakistan and improve relations with India.	45%

Issue B. How would you rank U.S. policy interests in South Asia? (percentages of first choices)

Restrain nuclear proliferation.	42%
Promote self-determination for Kashmir.	3%
Protect human rights.	10%
Support democratic leaders and policies.	23%
Encourage privatization, trade and investment.	15%

Issue C. If forced to choose between them, which country should the U.S. favor?

India	50%
Pakistan	9%

TOPIC 8: CHILDREN AT RISK

In pondering the fate of children around the world, participants affirmed their faith in the UN. Almost everyone agreed, though a few with some reservations, that the U.S. should ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Similarly there was strong support for the UN Population Fund. Over 80 percent urged the U.S. to resume funding of this UN program. As one participant amplified this choice of policy, "in order to reduce the population explosion, emphasis should be on family planning." Besides support for the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN Population Fund, there were scattered calls to "revive UNESCO," presumably by resuming U.S. membership in that organization. The least popular of the policy options involved bilateral U.S. aid.

Children, however, are not primarily a problem for American foreign policy. "Help American children first," wrote one participant in the discussion of how best to help children around the world. And when it came to problems of American children, participants looked to the government for solutions. There was overwhelming support for increased funding of such programs as Head Start and WIC (supplemental food for women, infants and children). By contrast, the policy of reducing the role of government while emphasizing that of the family mustered less support, though still a majority.

These are not easy choices. When children are suffering it is evident, in the words of one, that "family is not doing its job, church is not; government must play bigger role." Nearly every participant also endorsed the proposal that in order to help American children, the U.S. should apply the lessons learned from international programs that have done some good.

Issue A. To improve the lives of children throughout the world, the U.S. should:

	AGREE	AGREE WITH RESERVATIONS	DISAGREE	DISAGREE WITH RESERVATIONS
Ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.	66%	22%	4%	4%
Shift international aid priorities to increase funding for child survival and basic needs.	53%	32%	7%	3%
Shift bilateral aid priorities in order to direct more aid to the neediest countries.	33%	41%	12%	4%
Resume funding for the UN Population Fund.	61%	21%	7%	4%
Restructure the U.S. Agency for International Development so that its focus is on sustainable development and transfer security assistance programs to the State Department.	44%	29%	7%	5%

Issue B. To improve the lives of children in this country, the U.S. should:

	YES	NO
Apply the lessons learned from the international child survival program, which emphasized preventive health care and mass health education campaigns.	86%	2%
Increase investments in children's health and education programs, including Head Start and WIC.	82%	6%
Encourage a partnership between government and the private sector to improve children's lives.	79%	6%
Emphasize the role of the family and reduce the role of government.	57%	21%

CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS

All in all, 35,793 ballots were tabulated in this year's program. On the average, 4,500 participants sent in ballots for a given topic. For one of every three participants, this was a first-time experience. The background of participants differed considerably from the general population. Two thirds were female, and almost the same proportion was over 60 years of age. Almost three of every four participants were college graduates, with many also holding advanced degrees. A majority reported they had been abroad during the last four years.

A. How many years have you participated in the Great Decisions program?

This is the first year I have participated	35%
I participated in one previous year	15%
I participated in more than one previous year	50%

B. Age

17 or under	4%
18–30	7%
31–45	7%
46–60	16%
61 or over	65%

C. Sex

Female	64%
Male	36%

D. Have you been abroad during the last four years?

Yes	56%
No	44%

E. Highest level of formal education

Some high school	6%
High school degree	8%
Some college	16%
College graduate	38%
Advanced degree	33%

F. How often are you asked for your opinion on foreign policy matters?

Often	17%
Sometimes	50%
Hardly ever	32%

G. Would you say you have or have not changed your opinion in a fairly significant way as a result of taking part in the Great Decisions program?

Have changed	36%
Have not changed	35%
Uncertain	29%

Opinion ballots have been included in the Foreign Policy Association's Great Decisions *briefing book since 1955 to enable participants to make their views known to their representatives in Washington and to the news media. Again this year, the ballots received by June 30 were tabulated by Calculogic Corporation, 2929 Broadway, New York, N.Y.*

The National Opinion Ballot Report was written by Helmut Norpoth, professor of political science at the State University of New York at Stony Brook and a former consultant to The New York Times/CBS News Poll.

Additional copies of the report may be obtained free of charge from the Foreign Policy Association, 729 Seventh Ave., New York, NY 10019.

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The *Great Decisions* program is the largest public education series of its kind. Using the briefing book, participants meet in homes, classrooms, offices, civic and senior-citizen centers, places of worship and libraries to discuss the topics. Groups are sponsored locally by civic and community groups across the United States. For additional information, call FPA at (800) 628-5754 or (212) 764-4050.

TOPICS FOR *GREAT DECISIONS 1994*

1. **Conflict in Former Yugoslavia:**
   Quest for Solutions
2. **South Africa:**
   Forging a Democratic Union
3. **Ex-Soviet Bloc's Environmental Crisis:**
   Whose Problem? Who Pays?
4. **Trade with the Pacific Rim:**
   Pressure or Cooperation?
5. **Defense:**
   Redefining U.S. Needs and Priorities
6. **Argentina, Brazil, Chile:**
   Democracy and Market Economics
7. **Islam and Politics:**
   Egypt, Algeria and Tunisia
8. **New World Disorder?**
   U.S. in Search of a Role